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## PAUPERTAS (POVERTY) IN JOHN CALVIN'S *INSTITUTES*<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This article investigates the references to and use of the term *paupertas* ('poverty') by John Calvin in his *Institutes*. It appears that he uses *paupertas* in its physical and spiritual meaning. In the physical sense, the appropriate references are expressed in compelling language and denote helplessness when faced with the demands of life. *Paupertas* is also embedded in the theological context of the teaching of Scripture on the knowledge of the *providentia Dei*. In the spiritual sense, *paupertas* denotes the desperate aspect of spiritual poverty (i.e. 'unsaved, lost') and is related to the righteousness and work of salvation of Christ. In terms of Calvin's argumentation, it is clear that *paupertas* is linked to the (provided) true knowledge of God, Christ and 'ourselves' in terms of biblical revelation and qualification. Calvin thus reveals the landscape of reality in which the presuppositions of the popular philosophical concepts of fate, fortune, chance and other meta-historical causes are considered meaningless. In referring to poverty, or to the victim of poverty, Calvin neither argues that the *providentia Dei* is a passive perpetual divine determinism nor that it is sacrificed to a temporal interim divine involvement. He cautiously upholds a reverent distance in respect of God's knowledge. However, when considering true and credible knowledge of God, the pastor withholds nothing from the splendour of the teaching of Scripture in this regard. In his inscrutable *Deitas Dei* the Father of Christ is, and remains, unconditional even when poverty strikes. Instead of examining the causes of poverty, Calvin emphasises the living presence of God in terms of his relational and biblical thinking.

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Because the Bible speaks of poverty, and because of its visible presence in and impact upon Europe<sup>2</sup> and Geneva,<sup>3</sup> Calvin raises the issue of poverty (*paupertas*) in his textbook for theological students. This research traces Calvin's references to and use of the term *paupertas* (poverty) in the *Institutes*. It limits itself predominantly to verifying the Latin editions of the *Institutes* (or *Instruction*),<sup>4</sup> taking into account its text-historical development.<sup>5</sup> In order to

- 2 Poverty was a fundamental social issue and reality in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. See e.g. S. Kreiker, *Armut, Schule, Obrigkeit. Armenversorgung und Schulwesen in den evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1997), 24, 25; M. Rheinheimer, *Arme Bettler und Vaganten. Überleben in der Not 1450-1850* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2000), 14f. Individuals, societies and cities were constantly alarmed by its destructive and even fatal power to which anyone could fall prey, irrespective of person or position. Although cities reformed their relief to the poor and addressed the question on a social-structural level in terms of new legislation since approximately 1520, poverty and its associated hardships remained a physical threat (cf. Kreiker, *op. cit.*, 34f.).
- 3 Geneva, where Calvin lived and worked, was as a shelter for many refugees, overcrowded and poor. It was vulnerable to the threats of poverty. Even when the city experienced a time of economic growth after 1555, the poor, the shelter-less, the refugees did not disappear from the streets. See W.C. Innes, *Social Concern in Calvin's Geneva* (Allison Park: Pickwick Publications, 1983). It is a general orientation, not without simplifications. See also R.M. Kingdon, 'Social welfare in Calvin's Geneva', in: *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism. A Fourteen-volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles. Volume 3: Calvin's Work in Geneva*, ed. R.C. Gamble (New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 22-41. See also W.G. Naphy, 'Calvin's Geneva', in: *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. D.K. McKimm (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 25; A. Biéler, *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin* (Genève: Librairies de l'Université, 1959), 3f., 65f., 138f., 306f. See also F. Büsser, 'Calvins Wirtschafts- und Sozialethik', in: *Zwingliana* XI(6), 1961, 395-409 and M. Freudenberg, "Arme habt ihr allezeit bei euch" (Joh 12,8). Armut als Herausforderung für das kirchliche Handeln im reformierten Protestantismus — Einblicke und Orientierungen', in: *Die kleine Prophetin Kirche leiten*, ed. M. Böttcher - A. Schilberg - A-C. Tübler (Wuppertal: Foedus-Verlag, 2005), 96f.
- 4 Calvin's commentaries, sermons, ecclesiastical documents, theological treatises and letters are not considered. This also applies to his versification of Psalms, and relevant primary sources such as the minutes of the Geneva consistory.
- 5 For the text history of the editions of the *Institutes*, see R.A. Muller, 'Establishing the *Ordo docendi*. The organizing of Calvin's *Institutes*, 1536-1559', in: R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 118-139; W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin. An Introductory Guide*. Translator: Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1993), 195f. Cf. also *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia. Volumen I*, ed. Guilelmus Baum - Eduardus Cunitz - Eduardus Reuss (Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1863), XXXf. For the French editions of the *Institutes*, see Jean-Daniel Benoit, *Jean Calvin Institution de la Religion*

enhance a comprehensive understanding of Calvin's use of the noun poverty (*paupertas*) in the *Institutes*, equivalent terms — and derivatives — in the corresponding semantic fields have also been considered. This article endeavours to delve into Calvin's subjacent *Denkfiguren*, into the dynamic ideas and relational conceptualisations behind the applicable notions and articulation, rather than to provide a formal list of his use of the term. Calvin's references to the poor, the needy, the destitute, the deprived, *et cetera* were, however, deliberately omitted. Calvin's views in this regard will be argued in a follow-up article.

## 1. POVERTY AS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT NOT BEYOND GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Upon reading the *Institutes* one is struck by Calvin's perceptibly existential and compelling language when he refers to poverty. He must have been acquainted with the physical, emotional, mental and social effects of poverty (or to fall victim to it).<sup>6</sup> He accepted poverty as a given human condition. He links *paupertas* to events, unforeseen incidents and social transformations (peculiar to his own context) such as disasters, calamities, hardships, accidents, robbery, persecution, disease, injuries, disrepute, exile, imprisonment, shipwreck,<sup>7</sup> *et cetera*, that befall human beings, causing them to fall victim to it. Pestilence, war, frost and hail destroy the promise of the year "which plunges us into

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*Chrestienne Livre Premier. Edition critique avec introduction, notes et variantes* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1957), 12f. It is still interesting to read B.B. Warfield, 'The literary history of Calvin's "Institutes"', in: Gamble, R. (ed.), *op. cit.*, Volume 4: *Influences upon Calvin and Discussion of the 1559 Institutes*, 181-207.

- 6 Cf. H.J. Selderhuis, *Calvijn als asielzoeker*. Apeldoornse Studies 35 (Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit, 1997), 20, 21. Cf. also in this regard the references and careful exposition of F. Büsler, *Calvins Urteil über sich selbst* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1950), 61f., as well as §13 'Das Tragen des Kreuzes', 83f. This is also obvious in Calvin's commentary on the Psalms, published in 1557. See H.J. Selderhuis, *God in het midden. Calvijns theologie van de Psalmen* (Kampen: Kok, 2000). See also footnote 2.
- 7 Cf. e.g. OS IV.170.3f. (*Inst.* 3.8.11). It was included in the 1539 edition. In these footnotes, OS refers to *Joannis Calvinii Opera Selecta*. Ediderunt Petrus Barth Guilelmus Niesel. Monachii in Aedibus Chr. Kaiser. Vol. I: MDCCCCXXVI, Vol. III: MCMXXVIII, Vol. IV: MCMXXXI, Vol. V: MCMXXXVI. OS is followed by I, II, III, IV or V to indicate the relevant volume, followed by the numbers specifying the book, chapter, paragraph, line(s) and page(s).

penury".<sup>8</sup> According to Calvin, poverty holds ceaseless threats, and when subjected to it,<sup>9</sup> it causes *Angst* and bitterness, misery and hardship.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, poverty can affect everybody. All are liable to its unexpected and incalculable sieges. Nobody lives beyond its striking distance. Life is thus moulded with fear and constant anxiety.<sup>11</sup> In the *Institutes*, *paupertas* is an existential circumstance. Calvin does not marginalise it as something that is characteristic of the derelict in society. He accepts poverty as a reality, from which nobody is necessarily exempted. Calvin does not denote the causes or grounds of poverty; he emphasises events, and the dynamic course and complexity of history of which poverty forms part.

However, according to Calvin, it is a fact that nothing (including poverty or to be struck down by poverty) occurs without the will, command and control of God, thus outside his providence. It is significant that he broaches upon the term *paupertas* in the first Book of the 1559 *Institutes*, *De Cognitione Dei Creatoris*.<sup>12</sup> The references surface in chapter 17: *Quorsum et in quem scopum referenda sit haec doctrina, ut nobis constet eius utilitas*,<sup>13</sup> that is, whither

8 OS IV.160.24 (*Inst.* 3.7.10): *quae nos ad penuriam redigat* ... This was included in the 1539 edition. See the translation of Beveridge in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge, *Volume II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing House, reprinted 1975), 15: 'which reduces us to penury'. Hereafter referred to as Beveridge, *Volume II*.

9 Cf. OS III.214.28f. (*Inst.* 1.17.10): *Domus assidue incendio subiecta, interdium tibi paupertatem, noctu etiam oppressionem minatur*. These sentences were included in the 1539 edition. Beveridge, in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge, *Volume I* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing House, reprinted 1975), 192-193, translates: 'Your house, constantly exposed to fire, threatens you with poverty by day'. Hereafter referred to as Beveridge, *Volume I*.

10 Cf. OS IV.167.20f. (*Inst.* 3.8.8): *Si nulla esset in egestate asperitas, nullus in morbis cruciatus, nulla in ignominia punctio, nullus in morte horror: cuius foret vel fortitudinis vel moderationis, ea susque deque habere?* This was included in the 1539 edition. Calvin uses instead of *paupertas* the noun *egestas*, meaning 'indigence' or 'extreme poverty'. Beveridge, *Volume II*, 21, translates: 'Were there no hardship in poverty, no pain in disease, no sting in ignominy, no fear in death, where would be the fortitude and moderation enduring them?'

11 Cf. OS IV.158.31f. (*Inst.* 3.7.8). Our lives, he writes, are moulded by fear, by our hatred of poverty, lowly birth, and humble condition. These remarks were written in 1539.

12 Cf. OS III.31.3.

13 OS III.202.1-2 (*Inst.* 1.17). This heading was formulated for the 1559 edition.

and to what goal this teaching (*doctrina*) of providence<sup>14</sup> is useful to (or to the benefit or usefulness of) Christians.<sup>15</sup> This at least implies a meaningful 'reliance' on history as a reality on the providence of God.

In 1.17.5 Calvin considers reservations that were raised to bring his exposition of God's providence into disrepute. 'Why, then,' he outlines one of the questions, 'should a thief be punished when he robbed someone whom the Lord had chosen to be chastised by poverty?'<sup>16</sup> The crux of Calvin's answer is that wicked deeds cannot be employed to legitimise evil. In his sovereign righteousness God remains absolutely unbound. He cannot be drawn into or caught up in the sphere of sin. *Paupertas*, and its existential impact on the life of an individual, is an *obiter dictum* related to God's sovereignty, will, decree and righteousness.

In 1.17.10, *paupertas* is related to a realistic and feasible threat to life: sudden poverty caused by the burning down of a house and its depressing effects on the household by night.<sup>17</sup> But, Calvin immediately adds, this cannot be attributed to the predominance of chance or fortune.<sup>18</sup> He is aware that the last-mentioned opinion (the supremacy of chance, fortune, fate) prevailed in all ages and that in his day it was almost universally accepted. Had this been

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- 14 In the 1559-edition of the *Institutes* Calvin discusses God's providence in the last chapters of Book I, thereby assigning to it its own place within the structure of his theological argument. In the preceding editions providence and predestination were dealt with in the same chapter. The providence of God is also dealt with in *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione qua in salutem alios ex hominibus elegit, alios suo exitio reliquit: item de providentia, qua res humanas gubernat, Consensus Pastorum Genevensis Ecclesiae, a Io. Calvino expositus* (Genevae: M.D.LII). For a modern critical edition see *Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia denuo recognita et adnotatione critica instructa notisque illustrate. Series III: Scripta Ecclesiastica Volumen 1 De aeterna Dei Praedestinatione/De la Predestination eternelle*. Edidit Wilhelm H. Neuser texte française établie Olivier Fatio (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1998). For a modern German translation, see W.H. Neuser, *Johannes Calvin: Von der ewigen Vorherbestimmung Gottes* (Düsseldorf: Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, 1998).
- 15 For a survey of Calvin's views in this regard, cf. OS III.209-216 (*Inst.* 1.17.6-11). These paragraphs were substantially written for the 1539 edition.
- 16 OS III.208.3-4 (*Inst.* 1.17.5): *Cur ergo, iniquiunt, fur punietur, qui eum expilavit quem Dominus paupertate voluit castigare?* This and the following questions were included in the 1539 Latin edition of the *Institutes*.
- 17 *Domus assidue incendio subiecta, interdum tibi paupertatem, noctu etiam oppressionem minatur.* OS III.214.28-29 (*Inst.* 1.17.10). Paragraph 10 was incorporated in the 1539 edition.
- 18 OS III.215.6-7 (*Inst.* 1.17.10): ... *quam sensurus sit si sub imperium Fortunae redigatur*. Beveridge, *Volume I*, 192-193, translates as follows: 'Here, however, we were only referring to the misery which man should feel, were he placed under the dominion of chance'. Calvin included these remarks in the 1539 edition.

true, he argues, the resignation to chance and fortune would make one's life empty and futile. In this case, he concludes, the providence of God as taught by Scripture is obscured and almost buried.<sup>19</sup>

In both citations *paupertas* emerges in the context of a belief that there is a theological *rapport* between reality (or existence) and God's counsel, his sovereignty, omnipotence, justice, judgement and providence.<sup>20</sup> Calvin, however, does not enter into the province of meta-historical concepts, or explanations, or even causes (e.g. fortune, chance, fate, theologies of deserved punishment for transgression or sin, *etc.*), that were offered in his day as rationales to account for, or vindicate destructive events and calamities that afflicted life regularly. In contending the difference between philosophical and Christian patience he observes (in the third Book of the *Institutes*) that only a few philosophers, in contemplating the relation between God's will and human suffering, perceived that God tried people by means of affliction and that in this instance they must obey Him, *nisi quia ita necesse sit*.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, Calvin draws a vital line by linking human suffering to the true knowledge of God (to consider *in* the will of God his justice and equity) and knowledge of salvation, that is, of the work of Christ the Saviour. Fundamental to his exposition is the need for Scripture as guide and teacher in understanding or *knowing* — this is the key notion — God as Creator and his continual government or rule of the world by his providence. Calvin explains that Scripture calls believers to consider in the will of God his justice and equity as well as his concern for their salvation.<sup>22</sup> The understanding of the philosophers was not true know-

19 Cf. OS III.188-189.29f. (*Inst.* 1.16.2). These remarks were added in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*.

20 Cf. OS III.187.7 (*Inst.* 1.16): *Deum sua virtute mundum a se conditum fovere ac tueri, et singulas eius partes sua providentia regere*. Calvin upholds the *Deitas Dei*, emphasising God's omnipotence and presence in sustaining the creation and life. History unfolds under the divine hand. God's faithfulness to his creation, by means of his providence, keeps this world inhabitable and takes care of the sustainability of life itself. By his providence, Calvin asserts, God nourishes and maintains the world He has created. God's immutability and power makes the teaching of providence, independent of and against empirical evidence, a true source of comfort for the believer.

21 OS IV.169.36 (*Inst.* 3.8.11). This was included in the 1539 edition, with Seneca in mind.

22 OS IV.169.39-170.2 (*Inst.* 3.8.11): *Scriptura autem longe aliud in voluntate Dei considerare iubet, nempe iustitiam primum et aequitatem: deinde salutis nostrae curam*. This was incorporated in the 1539 edition. Cf. also OS IV.170.20-22 (*Inst.* 5.8.11): *... hac etiam parte consolatur nos optimus Pater, dum asserit, se eo ipso quod nos cruce affligit, saluti nostrae consulere*: the cross with which He afflicts us, He provides for our salvation. (Included in the 1539 edition.)

ledge of God. In this respect he concludes that Christian exhortations to patience are different: *Sive paupertas, sive exilium, sive carcer, sive contumelia, sive morbus, sive orbitas, seu quid aliud simile nos cruciat, cogitandum nihil istorum accidere nisi nutu ac providentia Dei.*<sup>23</sup>

In 'Calvins Denken', Michael Beintker points out that 'die Dynamik Calvins Schrifthermeneutik' is accomplished 'in die lebendige, dynamische Beziehungen ... zwischen der Anrede des Wortes Gottes und dem Glauben des Menschen, der diese Anrede hört und erwidert.'<sup>24</sup> This assumes that the relation between history as reality (including poverty or falling victim to it) and the providence of God is to be apprehended, in terms of the teaching of Scripture, in dynamic rather than static categories.

## 2. TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Truthful and reliable knowledge of God and the attainment of such knowledge are crucial notions in the teachings of Calvin. In fact, the 'knowledge of God and ourselves'<sup>25</sup> serves as a basic premise for his *Institutes*.<sup>26</sup> In seeking God, human beings cannot ascend higher than themselves; they subsequently conceive of God in terms of their own speculations, measures and superstition according to 'the dream and figment of their own heart'<sup>27</sup> — as the philosophers did. They 'imagine Him to be whatever their own rashness has devised,'<sup>28</sup> he remarks. They portray Him as sitting idly in heaven.<sup>29</sup> Such pre-

23 OS IV.170.3-6 (*Inst.* 3.8.11). Whether poverty, or exile, or imprisonment, or insult, or disease, or bereavement or any such evil affects us, we must think that none of them happens except by the will and providence of God. Cf. also Beveridge, *Volume II*, 23. This was included in the 1539 edition.

24 Cf. M. Beintker, 'Calvins Denken in Relationen', in: *Calvinus Evangelii Propugnator. Calvin, Champion of the Gospel. Papers from the International Congress on Calvin Research Seoul, 1998*. D.F. Wright - A.N.S. Lane - J. Balslerac (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 2006), 23.

25 Cf. OS III.31.8 (*Inst.* 1.1): *Dei cognitione et nostri*.

26 Cf. E.A. Dowey, 'The structure of Calvin's Thought as Influenced by the Twofold Knowledge of God', in: *Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevensis Custos. Die Referate des Internationalen Kongresses für Calvinforschung vom 6. bis 9. September 1982 in Genf*, ed. W.H. Neuser (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1984), 135-148.

27 Cf. OS III.41.19f. (*Inst.* 1.4.1): ... *sed cordis sui figmentum potius et somnium* .... For a translation, see Beveridge, *Volume I*, 46. This sentence was incorporated in the 1539 edition.

28 Cf. Beveridge, *Volume I*, 46. OS III.41.14-15 (*Inst.* 1.4.1): ... *sed qualem pro sua temeritate fabricati sunt, imaginantur*. This was incorporated in the 1539 edition.

29 Cf. OS III.42.2-3 (*Inst.* 1.4.2): ... *otiosum caelo includunt*. Also compare the rest of the paragraph, first published in the 1559 edition.

sentations and images are misleading and obscure any sensible and prudent knowledge of the living God. God is no spectre or phantom, to be metamorphosed at each individual's caprice.<sup>30</sup>

True knowledge of God is conformable and responds to biblical teaching, where God is described truthfully and alive.<sup>31</sup> 'And here we must observe again,' Calvin writes,

that the knowledge of God which we are invited to cultivate is not that which, resting satisfied with empty speculation, only flutters in the brain, but a knowledge which will prove substantial and fruitful wherever it is duly perceived, and rooted in the heart.<sup>32</sup>

In this instance knowledge (*notitia*) correlates with being rooted in the heart. In Book 3 Calvin similarly observes:

... *neque enim si in summo cerebro volutatur Dei verbum, fide perceptum est: sed ubi in imo corde radices egit, ut ad sustinendas repellendasque omnes tentationum machinas invictum sit propugnaculum.*<sup>33</sup>

30 OS III.42.30 (*Inst.* 1.4.3): ... *non spectrum esse aut phantasma, quod pro uniuscuiusque libidine transformetur.* See Beveridge, *Volume I*, 47, for a translation. This remark was already included in the 1539 edition.

31 Cf. OS III.63.25f. (*Inst.* 1.6.3):

*Ad verbum, inquam, est veniendum, ubi probe, et ad vivum, nobis a suis operibus describitur Deus, dum opera ipsa non ex iudicii nostri pravitate, sed aeternae veritatis regula aestimantur.*

See also the translation of Beveridge, *Volume I*, 66-67: 'We must go, I say, to the Word, where the character of God, drawn from his works, is described accurately and to the life; these works being estimated, not by our depraved judgement, but by the standard of eternal truth'. Calvin included this sentence in the 1539 edition.

32 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 57. Cf. OS III.53.10-14 (*Inst.* 1.5.9):

*Atque hic rursus observandum est, invitari nos ad Dei notitiam, non quae inani speculatione contenta in cerebro tantum volitet, sed quae solida futura sit et fructuosa si rite percipiatur a nobis, radicemque agat in corde.*

Calvin uses *notitia*, which can be translated as to 'have a knowledge, a knowing'. These remarks were incorporated in the 1539 edition.

33 OS IV.46.34f. (*Inst.* 3.2.36). Beveridge, *Volume I*, 501, translates:

The Word is not received in faith when it merely flutters in the brain, but when it has taken deep root in the heart, and become an invincible bulwark to withstand and repel all the assaults of temptation.

This 'deeply rooted' knowledge is not confusing and brings to an end any speculative reflection and the need to create an imaginary picture of God.<sup>34</sup>

The knowledge of God, according to Calvin, is not founded on human figments and attributes. Nor can it be based on (negative) experiences of devastating events. Trustworthy knowledge of God (to return to Book 1) is portrayed by Scripture<sup>35</sup> through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> Thus the testimony of Scripture is not futile or meaningless.<sup>37</sup> Neither is it pointless. The living voice of God, heard in Scripture,<sup>38</sup> effects true knowledge of God, through conceded faith. It is not born of personal experience or spirituality.<sup>39</sup> Scripture is heard and listened to in the presence of the living Lord.

34 Cf. *OS* III.154.24-26 (*Inst.* 1.14.2): ... *sed aeternam quoque eius sapientiam et Spiritum nobis proponi; ne alium Deum somnietur quam qui in illa expressa imagine vult agnosci.* Beveridge, *Volume I*, 143, translates:

... but that his eternal Wisdom and Spirit are also set before us, in order that we may not dream of any other God who desires to be recognized in that express image.

It is also not 'a bare and empty name of deity that merely flutters in our brain without genuine knowledge' of God. Cf. *OS* III.109.21-23 (*Inst.* 1.13.2). These remarks were first included in the 1559 edition.

35 See the entire chapter 6 of Book I: *OS* III.60.9f. (*Inst.* 1.6).

36 See the entire chapter 7 of Book I: *OS* III.65.1f. (*Inst.* 1.7).

37 Cf. the translation of Beveridge, *Volume I*, 115. See *OS* III.117.1f. (*Inst.* 1.13.7):

*quum Dei verbum nobis proponitur in Scriptura, absurdissimum fuerit imaginari fluxam duntaxat et evanidam vocem, quae in aerem emissa prodeat extra ipsum Deum: cuiusmodi et oracula Patribus edita, et prophetiae omnes fuerunt ...*

This was included in the 1539 edition. Simpson's translation in Afrikaans reads as follows:

Wanneer die Woord van God in die Skrif aan ons voorgehou word, sou dit gewis baie dwaas wees om dit slegs as 'n verganklike en verdwynende stem voor te stel wat in die lug losgelaat word sonder dat God te voorskyn kom en dat die godsprake wat aan die vaders gegee is en ook al die profesieë van so 'n aard was.

See Johannes Calvin, *Institusie van die Christelike Godsdiens. 1.* Vertaal deur H.W. Simpson (Potchefstroom: Calvin Jubileum Boekefonds, 1984), 220.

38 Cf. *OS* III.65-71 (*Inst.* 1.7.1-5). See e.g. *OS* III.65.15f. (*Inst.* 1.7.1): ... *acsi vivae ipsae Dei voces illic exaudirentur.*

39 Cf. *OS* III.81.17-32 (*Inst.* 1.8.13). For a translation, see Beveridge, *Volume I*, 83. Also *ibid.*, 68-69.

It is evident that this knowledge of God affects the human. Its effect, Calvin earlier pointed out, ought to be to teach 'us reverence and fear' and to 'induce us, under his guidance and teaching, to ask every good thing from Him, and when it is received, to ascribe it to Him.'<sup>40</sup> Those who have received this knowledge of God perceive how He governs all things and confide in Him as their guardian and protector. They cast themselves entirely upon his faithfulness and comprehend Him to be the source of every blessing. When human beings are driven in a corner, or experience a want, or are struck by poverty, they instantaneously turn to God's protection and trust his aid. They lean on Him with confidence, and doubt not that, in the divine clemency, a remedy will be provided in all times of need. In acknowledging Him as their Father and Lord, they consider themselves 'bound to have respect to his authority in all things, to reverence his majesty, aim at the advancement of his glory, and obey his commands.'<sup>41</sup> Such a person will regard Him as a just judge, armed with severity to punish crimes, and will keep 'the judgement-seat always in his view.'<sup>42</sup>

In Calvin's exposition this particular knowledge of God is the fundamental assumption of his providence. Why? Once true and real knowledge of God is received, the eyes are opened to recognise and appreciate his providence. But, this cannot be realised without knowledge of Christ. Until Christ, he emphasises, interposes to reconcile man with God, it is impossible to perceive God to be the Father.

... it is one thing to perceive that God our Maker supports us by his power, rules us by his providence, fosters us by his goodness, and visits us by all kinds of blessings, but another thing to embrace his grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ.<sup>43</sup>

40 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 41. OS III.35.18-20 (*Inst.* 1.2.2): ... *deinde ut ea duce ac magistra omne bonum ab illo petere, et illi acceptum ferre discamus.* This was included in the 1559 edition.

41 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 41-42. OS III.36.18-20 (*Inst.* 1.2.2): ... *eum quoque dignum statuit esse cuius imperium in omnibus intueri, maiestatem suspicere, gloriam promovendam curare, mandatis obsequi debeat.* This was first included in the 1559 edition.

42 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 41-42. OS III.36.21-22 (*Inst.* 1.2.2). ... *eius tribunal semper in conspectu sibi proponit* ... This was incorporated in the 1559 edition.

43 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 40. OS III.34.17-21 (*Inst.* 1.2.1):  
... *aliud tamen est sentire Deum fictorem nostrum sua nos potentia fulcire, providentia regere, bonitate fovere, omnique benedictionum genere prosequi: aliud vero, gratiam reconciliationis in Christo nobis propositam amplecti.*

This was written in the 1539 edition.

Thus the Word and the Holy Spirit generate knowledge of God, knowledge that recognises the mediation of Christ Jesus and effects the arrogation (embracing) of Him as the Saviour. This implies that the providence of God cannot be recognised without knowing Christ through faith. Referring to Hebrews xi:3, Calvin asserts that faith makes us understand that the world was created by the Word of God. He observes:

Without proceeding to his providence, we cannot understand the full force of what is meant by God being the Creator, how much we may seem to comprehend it with our mind, and confess it with our tongue.<sup>44</sup>

It is by faith that man penetrates deeper. After learning that there is a creator, it becomes clear that He is also a governor and preserver, and by a special providence sustains, cherishes and superintends all the things He has made.<sup>45</sup>

Calvin interrelates Christ, faith and providence. For him the providence of God is not merely a theological concept or construction. The issue at hand is God's knowledge, which is conveyed by means of Scripture and the Holy Spirit as *au fait* ('cognisant') knowledge of God. In thinking along these lines, Calvin opens a perspective on the providence of God in which the light falls on the Father who provided Christ the Saviour. Christ was sent into the world by his Father to preach good tidings to the poor (*ut evangelizaret pauperibus*), to encourage the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives, and to open the prison to those who are bound to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.<sup>46</sup> Calvin's concern is with the living God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in terms of the scriptural revelation and qualification. He spells it out: '... and to this we may refer our Saviour's words, that He and his Father have always been at work from the beginning' (John v:17); also in the words of Paul, that in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts xvii:28), and in the words of the author of Hebrews, '... that He upholdeth all things by the word of his power (Heb i:3).'<sup>47</sup>

44 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 171-172. OS III.187.19f. (*Inst.* 1.16.1):

... *quia nisi ad providentiam eius usque transimus, nondum rite capimus quid hoc valeat, Deum esse creatorem: utcunque et mente comprehendere et lingua fateri videamur.*

This was also included in the 1539 edition.

45 Cf. OS III.188.1-7 (*Inst.* 1.16.1). This observation was included in the 1539 edition.

46 OS IV.214.18f. (*Inst.* 3.12.7). Calvin is quoting Isaiah 61:1. These sentences were included in the 1539 edition.

47 Translation of Beveridge, *Volume I*, 176. OS III.194.15f. (*Inst.* 1.16.4):

*Atque huc referri potest quod dicit Christus, se et Patrem ab initio usque semper fuisse in opere: et quod Paulus docet, in ipso nos vivere,*

Calvin therefore does not link knowledge and the acknowledgement of the providence of God with human conjectures or interpretations of events or historical reality. This would play into the hands of misleading conceptualisation, as stated earlier. In the disclosure of God's providence his autonomous justice, judgement and holiness, Calvin says, are discovered. He concedes that it is true that there are mysteries which transcend man's sense — God's judgements are deep<sup>48</sup> — but

since God, to enable his people to understand those secretaries which He has deigned to reveal in his word, enlightens their minds with a spirit of understanding, they are now no longer a deep, but a path in which they can walk safely, a lamp to guide their feet, a light of life, a school of clear and certain truth.<sup>49</sup>

The belief in God's providence is therefore not tinsel. Neither is it a 'biblical alternative' for chance or fate or fortune as *rationales* ('causes') for the unforeseeable and ungovernable course of history. God declares, Calvin remarks, that He is the protector and even the avenger of innocence, by shedding blessings on the good, helping their necessities, soothing and solacing their griefs, relieving their sufferings and providing for their safety.<sup>50</sup> Neither his power nor his wisdom is shrouded in darkness. The excellence of the divine wisdom is manifested in distributing everything with due reason, and taking the wise in

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*moveri, et esse* (Act. 17.f.28); *quod etiam author epistolae ad Hebraeos Christi divinitatem probare volens, dicit potenti eius nutu sustineri omnia* (Hebr. 1.a.3).

48 Cf. OS III.204.10f. (*Inst.* 1.17.2).

49 Cf. OS III.204.21f. (*Inst.* 1.17.2):

... *sed quoniam Deus ad capienda haec mysteria, quae verbo patefacere dignatus est, suorum mentes intelligentiae spiritu illuminat: nulla iam illic abyssus, sed via, in qua tuto ambulandum est, et lucerna pedibus regendis, et lux vitae, et certae conspiciuaeque veritatis schola.*

The translation is that of Beveridge, *Volume I*, 185. See also the translation of Simpson, *Institusie* 1, 319-320:

Omdat God egter die verstand van die wat aan Hom behoort met die gees van begrip verlig, om hierdie geheimenisse te begryp wat Hy waardig geag het om deur sy woord te openbaar, is daarin nou nie meer 'n afgrond nie, maar 'n weg waarop ons veilig moet wandel, 'n lamp om ons voete te rig, 'n lig vir ons lewe en 'n skool van die sekere en duidelike waarheid.

This was incorporated in the 1539 edition.

50 Cf. e.g. OS III.52.9f. (*Inst.* 1.5.7).

their own craftiness (I Cor. ii:19); in brief, conducting all things in perfect accordance with reason.<sup>51</sup> God displays his power and manifests his wisdom, justice, goodness and mercy.<sup>52</sup> It becomes evident that Satan is under the rule of God, and is so ruled by his authority that he must obey it.<sup>53</sup>

God, the argument continues, is not blind. His eyes are always open.<sup>54</sup> He sees everything in its entirety. The providence that Calvin has in mind is not one whereby God, disengaged in heaven, looks upon what is taking place in the world, but one whereby He holds the rudder in his hands and rules all events. Hence his providence extends to both his hands and his eyes.<sup>55</sup> This indicates that nothing in history is unbeknown to Him. He cannot be taken by surprise. God is God. Scripture plainly shows that everything is subject to Him, even those things, Calvin stresses, that are seen as most fortuitous. When a branch snaps from a tree and kills a passing traveller, this cannot be attributed to chance.<sup>56</sup> Neither can, he adds, being rich, or being poor, or suddenly being overtaken by poverty,<sup>57</sup> be ascribed to fortune.<sup>58</sup> Confirmation is taken from Scripture: Job recognised that he was stripped of all his property and made a poor man, because it so pleased God.<sup>59</sup>

51 OS III.52.24f. (*Inst.* 1.5.8); OS III.52.30-36 (*Inst.* 1.5.8); OS III.52.37f. (*Inst.* 1.5.8). For a translation, see Beveridge, *Volume I*, 57. This was included in the 1539 edition.

52 Cf. OS III.54.8-16 (*Inst.* 1.5.10). For a translation, see Beveridge, *Volume I*, 58.

53 OS III.167.30f. (*Inst.* 1.14.17). See Beveridge, *Volume I*, 153: 'God holds him bound and tattered by the curls of his power'.

54 OS III.197.5 (*Inst.* 1.16.6).

55 OS III.192.13f. (*Inst.* 1.16.4):

... non qua Deus e caelo otiosus speculetur quae in mundo fiunt, sed qua veluti clavum tenens, eventus omnes moderatur. Ita non minus ad manus quam ad oculos pertinet.

This sentence was added in the 1559 edition. Calvin included the same idea at the end of the following paragraph:

*Certe si avium volatus certo Dei consilio regitur, fateri necesse est cum Propheta, sic eum habitare in sublimi, ut se humiliet ad videndum quaecunq; accidit in caelo et in terra* (Psal. 112.a.5). Cf. also OS III.196.1-4 (*Inst.* 1.16.5).

56 OS III.196.25f. (*Inst.* 1.16.6). In this regard Calvin refers to Proverbs 29:13 and 22:2. It was included in the 1539 edition.

57 Cf. OS III.214.28f. (*Inst.* 1.17.10). We are not excluded from poverty, Calvin remarks in a later paragraph, it suddenly overtakes us. This was written for the 1539 edition.

58 OS III.215.3f. (*Inst.* 1.17.10). Cf. also OS III.196.29 (*Inst.* 1.16.6): *Sortes similiter quis non fortunae caecitati permittat?* See also OS III.188.31f. (*Inst.* 1.16.2).

59 Job 1:21. Cf. OS III.220.10f. (*Inst.* 1.18.1).

According to Calvin, this is not executed at random. God acts in agreement with his counsel (*consillium*), in terms of his office as judge.<sup>60</sup> This has to do with Calvin's sense that the entire human race is under divine judgement because of their sins. Many evils can be interpreted in terms of divine retributive punishment or in terms of fatherly chastisement.<sup>61</sup> The course of history is thus encompassed by God's justice and judgement. No grounds can be advanced against his consequent righteous ordination. In this regard, Calvin assumes a correlation with his exposition on evil, the fall of man and sin.<sup>62</sup> He emphasises that God is not the author of evil. He may not be blamed for sin or evil.<sup>63</sup> God cannot be implicated.<sup>64</sup>

God therefore sees in his own way, very differently from the way in which man sees and perceives. God is not watching as if from a watch-tower, waiting for fortuitous events to occur.<sup>65</sup> It is not even a question of merely permitting them to arise. The providence of God cannot be substituted by bare permission. The innumerable ills and destruction which beset human life,<sup>66</sup> seemingly exposed to every blind and random stroke of fortune and dominion of chance, are indeed subjected to God's will.<sup>67</sup> Even though rich and poor are mixed in this world,<sup>68</sup> or even though the impiety prosper and flourish, while the godly are oppressed with ignominy, poverty, and contempt, the teaching of God's providence comforts those who are enlightened to appreciate it.<sup>69</sup> Admonishing and conso-

60 Cf. OS III.196.23-25 (*Inst.* 1.16.6): *Porro quo magis exprimeret Scriptura, nihil penitus in mundo geri nisi ex eius destinatione, quae maxime fortuita videntur, illi subiaccere ostendit.* For a translation, see Beveridge, *Volume I*, 177. See also OS III.197.13f. (*Inst.* 1.16.6): *Quia non potest Deus exuere iudicis munus: hinc ratiocinatur, arcano eius consilio alios excellere, alios manere contemptibiles.* See for a translation, Beveridge, *Volume I*, 178. Both these quotations were added in the 1559 edition.

61 Cf. P. Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 125, 100f.

62 This is treated extensively in Book 2. See next paragraph below.

63 Cf. in this regard OS III.174.1-16 (*Inst.* 1.15.1). These were incorporated in the 1539 edition.

64 Cf. OS III.207.37f. (*Inst.* 1.17.5). This was included in the 1539 edition.

65 Cf. OS III.221.21f. (*Inst.* 1.18.1). This was incorporated in the 1559 edition.

66 Cf. OS III.214.12f. (*Inst.* 1.17.10). This was included in the 1539 edition.

67 Cf. OS III.196.21f. (*Inst.* 1.16.6): *Ridicula sane insania, quod facere sine Deo instituunt miseri homines, qui ne profari quidem possunt nisi quod ille voluerit.* Included in the 1539 edition.

68 OS III.197.3f. (*Inst.* 1.16.6). This was incorporated in the 1559 edition.

69 Cf. the noticeable exposition on the providence of God in Calvin's work by L.W. van der Meij, *Het roer in Gods Handen. Calvijn over de kennis van God de Schepper* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1990), 136f., 154f., 172f. See also A. de Reuver, *Kruis en Gratie. Calvijn over de rechtvaardiging, het kruisdragen, het gebed* (Dordrecht: J.P. van den Tol, 1980), 61f.

lation could not remain in abeyance. Not when God's revelation in terms of his providence and omnipotence is the presupposition. And, his justice can in no way be obscured. It is the integrity of God's providence that makes life liveable, provides comfort, consolation and prospect.

If considered that most of Calvin's references to the concrete experience of poverty, shame, calamities, injustice and unexpected events causing suffering, sorrow and mischief, are made in conjunction with his teaching on the providence of God, it is clear that the appraisal of these references must allow for the crucial role of Calvin's teaching on the true and trustworthy knowledge of God. Scripture calls us, he writes, to resign ourselves and all our possessions to God's will. Calvin finds the sum of the Christian life in the denial of 'ourselves'.<sup>70</sup> The essence of this denial (*abnegationis* > *abnego*) is not to renounce oneself, but rather to 'look to God' (*in Deum spectare*<sup>71</sup>), also from within the anxiety and discomfort of the present life and its threats, uncertainties, claims, and temptations.<sup>72</sup>

Calvin thus links poverty, or to be struck by poverty, to the knowledge of God as Creator and Saviour, in particular to knowledge of his providence. His concern remains with the living God, the God of Abraham, Jacob and Isaac, the Father of Jesus Christ the Lord. God may not be distanced from this world and history. In his inscrutable *Deitas Dei* He is unconditional immediate.<sup>73</sup> In Christ. More issues can be considered when contemplating God's providence in and over history and the events of history. Still devoid of true and trustworthy knowledge of Christ disclosed by Scripture, pondering philosophers missed a cardinal point. There was no lamp to guide them; they had to submit to fate or doom, and thus to chance and fortune.

70 Cf. Book III Chapter 7: *Summa vitae Christianae: ubi de abnegatione nostri*, OS IV.151.7 (*Inst* 3.7).

71 OS IV.158.20 (*Inst* 3.7.8): *Praecipuam abnegationis nostri partem, quam diximus in Deum spectare ...* This was already formulated in the Latin edition of 1539, which was compiled in Strassburg. Cf. *COI Institutio Christianae Religionis Editiones inter primam et ultimam mediae annis scilicet 1539, 1543, 1545 argentorati item 1550, 1553, 1554*, Cap. xvii, col. 1133. In the French edition it was translated as *laquelle regarde Dieu*. See Benoit: *Jean Calvin* III.VII.8, 173.

72 Cf. OS IV.3.7.8 line 27, 158. This was included in the 1539 edition.

73 Cf. Selderhuis, *God in het midde ... op. cit.*, 46, 99f.

### 3. SPIRITUAL POVERTY AND TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF OURSELVES

Calvin also uses the term *paupertas* to denote the desperate position of spiritual poverty. He starts the second Book of the *Institutes* with an exposition *de peccato originale*.<sup>74</sup> He elucidates the destructive power of sin and the weakness of man.<sup>75</sup> Even when he was raised to the highest pinnacle of honour, that is before the fall, all that Scripture attributes to him, Calvin emphasises, is that he was created in the image of God. This indicates that the blessings for his happiness were not his own, but from divine communication.<sup>76</sup> Now that he is stripped of all his given glory, he ought, at least, to glorify God by the confession of his poverty, his total depravity.<sup>77</sup> Such is the true knowledge of 'ourselves'. The ministry (words, promises) of Christ declares that no one is admitted to enjoy the blessings of God unless he is pining under his own true poverty, disgrace, nakedness, want and misery before the eyes of the holy God.<sup>78</sup> He must therefore abandon all self-approbation. Man cannot rely on his own strength. Yet Calvin emphasises that no one is permitted to receive God's blessings except those who are consumed by the awareness of their own poverty (i.e. spiritual poverty).<sup>79</sup>

74 See OS III.228. Cf. also OS III.233.5f. (*Inst.* 2.1.5): *Haec est haereditaria corruptio, quam peccatum originale veteres nuncuparunt, Peccati voce intelligentes naturae antea bonae puraeque depravationem*. This was stated in the 1539 edition.

75 See W.-A. Hauck, *Sünde und Erbsünde nach Calvin. Ein wissenschaftliche Darstellung mit Berücksichtigung der 'Sünden'-Lehre Luthers u. modernier Theologen* (Heidelberg: Evangelischer Verlag Jakob Comtesse, 1939[2]). Compier subjected Calvin's 'doctrine of sin to a rhetorical treatment' in the hope to demonstrate 'something of theology's ability to perform historically effective acts of transformation'. See D.H. Compier, *John Calvin's Rhetorical Doctrine of Sin* (Leviston, Queenston, Lamparter: The Edwin Mellin Press, 2001), 11.

76 OS III.241.32f. (*Inst.* 2.2.1). This was included in the 1539 edition.

77 OS III.242.2f. (*Inst.* 2.2.1), referring to Is. 40:29 and Is. 60:19. Included for the 1539 edition.

78 OS III.252.20-22 (*Inst.* 2.2.10): *Ut quisque maxime suae calamitatis, inopiae, nuditatis, ignominiae conscientia deiectus est et consternatus, ita optime in sui cognitione profecisse*. This was included in the 1539 edition.

79 See OS III.252-253.19f. (*Inst.* 2.2.10), included in the 1539 edition. True humility gives God alone the honour. To accentuate the point, Calvin elsewhere refers to Zeph. 3:11, 12 and concludes that Scripture plainly shows who are the humble — those who lie afflicted by a knowledge of their poverty. To the humble, those who are of a contrite spirit and wounded heart, whom God designs to save, nothing but hope in the Lord is left. There is no access to salvation unless all pride is laid aside and true humility is embraced. This humility is not a kind of moderation by which they yield to God some article of their right, but it is the unfeigned submission of a mind overwhelmed by a serious conviction of its want and misery. Cf. OS IV.213.19f. (*Inst.* 3.12.6).

The teaching of spiritual poverty is significant. Human beings have no qualities, no authority, no power, no merit, nothing to offer to disengage themselves from this desperate position. The destruction of sin and consequential utter wickedness and corruption instigate the crucial problem of their existence and way of living. They are consigned to the righteous and absolute judgement of God. There are people who live a life untouched by the destructive harm of physical poverty. Calvin is clear and extreme: We are all in the grip of spiritual poverty and distress. His argument does not conclude here. At the beginning of chapter 15 of Book 1 he observes that ‘we cannot clearly and properly know God unless the knowledge of ourselves is added’.<sup>80</sup> The acknowledgement of one’s spiritual poverty is therefore an existential acknowledgement that only Christ, on the grounds of his meritorious work, can truly secure a person from this position of hopelessness. The Father in his providence provided the Saviour. Divine exoneration and redemption from this *paupertas* is granted to those who impute his righteousness through the Word and the Holy Spirit. It becomes evident why the notion is embedded in *De Cognitione Dei Redemptoris in Christo*<sup>81</sup> and directly relates to Calvin’s teaching of Christ the Saviour and his work of salvation.

Is spiritual poverty linked to physical poverty? Indeed. Since spiritual poverty is a radical affirmation of mankind’s deserved position under God’s righteous judgement and his vulnerability to the destructive forces of sin (and therefore to physical poverty), it also denotes that in poverty itself, or being poor as such, there is no meritorious justification which can be used by man to determine his relation with God. This is the reason why Calvin refutes the ecclesiastical concept of voluntary poverty — and the ethos bestowed upon it — of the (e.g.) monastic profession in Book 4 of the *Institutes*.<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

It runs like a bold core through Book 3 of the *Institutes*: Even in the appropriation of the salvation Calvin finds no scope for human merit and contribution. The gratuitous character of salvation in Christ is accordingly sustained. Calvin not only declines the contemporary Roman Catholic concept of apparent and perceptible good works, but is also cautious not to award spiritual merit to

80 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume I*, 159. Cf. *OS* III.173.29f. (*Inst.* 1.15.1): ... *sed quia, ut initio diximus, non potest liquido et solide cognosci Deus a nobis nisi accedat mutua nostri cognitio.*

81 See *OS* III.228f. (*Inst.* 2.1) (My emphasis - RMB.)

82 Cf. *OS* V.247f. (*Inst.* 4.13.10-17). For his criticism of nuns, see *OS* V.256f. (*Inst.* 4.13.19&20). Compare also his treatment of poverty and priests *OS* V.87f. (*Inst.* 4.5.17&18), and poverty and bishops *OS* V.107.4f. (*Inst.* 4.7.3).

inward convictions and experiences, embodied in such matters as penitence, devoutness, piety and even faith. He is convinced that the term merit is unscriptural and dangerous. It is foreign to Scripture (*extranea a Scripturis*)<sup>83</sup> and produces great offence and little fruit. It is a most prideful term (*certe ut est fastuosissimum*) that obscures God's favour.<sup>84</sup>

This is evident, for example, when Calvin examines the doctrine of confession and penance of the *scholastici sophistae*.<sup>85</sup> He argues that the sinner cannot depend on his own compunction and tears, but that he should fix both eyes upon Christ's mercy alone. In this regard Calvin reminds the offender that, according to Scripture, those who labour are called by Christ because He was sent to bring to the poor the good news, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim forgiveness to the captives, to free the prisoners, to comfort the mourners.<sup>86</sup> In recognising his misery, captivity and (spiritual) poverty man must be enjoined to hunger and thirst after Christ's mercy, merit and satisfaction. True humility,<sup>87</sup> that recognises the absolute inability and powerlessness of man to save himself, gives glory to God.<sup>88</sup> Thus, he concludes, repentance cannot be the cause of the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness of sins is not earned by complete contrition.

In Chapter 17 of the third Book of the *Institutes* on *Promissionum Legis et Evangelii conciliatio*,<sup>89</sup> Calvin explicitly returns to the consequences of his argument. 'When we have been engrafted in Christ' (*ubi in Christum insiti sumus*),<sup>90</sup> we are righteous in God's sight because our iniquities are covered

83 OS IV.240.14 (*Inst.* 3.15.2), written in 1539.

84 OS IV.240.20 (*Inst.* 3.15.2). Formulated in the 1539 edition.

85 See OS IV.84.38 (*Inst.* 3.4.1). This paragraph was substantially formulated in the 1536 and 1539 editions of the *Institutes*.

86 Cf. OS IV.88.29 (*Inst.* 3.4.3): *Tantum admonuimus, vocari a Christo laborantes et oneratos, quando missus sit ad evangelizandum pauperibus, ad sanandum contritos corde, praedicandum captives remissionem, ac educendos vincetos, consolandos lugentes* (Matt. 11. d. 28; Iesa. 61. a. 1; Luc. 4. c. 18).

87 So much emphasis is placed on humility because Calvin is too aware of that deep-rooted urge of self-assertion and self-exaltation. We all so blindly rush, he says, to embrace self-love that everyone thinks he has a good reason for exalting himself and despising all others in comparison. Hence the insolence with which each confidently and proudly despises others, looking down upon them as inferiors. The poor yields to the rich, the plebeian to the noble, the servant to the master, the unlearned to the learned, and yet every one inwardly cherishes some idea of his own superiority. OS IV.157.27 (*Inst.* 3.7.4). (Formulated in the 1539 edition.) Cf. also footnote 79 above.

88 OS IV.89.7 (*Inst.* 3.4.3). Formulated in the 1536 edition.

89 Cf. OS IV.253.12 (*Inst.* 3.17).

90 OS IV.263.7 (*Inst.* 3.17.10), incorporated in the 1543 edition.

by Christ's sinlessness. Thus our sins are pardoned.<sup>91</sup> Their 'works' — i.e. the practical embodiment of life in terms of the law of God — are righteous, because whatever fault is in them is buried in Christ's purity. By faith alone not only persons themselves but their 'works' are justified as well, he concludes. No human spiritual condition or (religious) experience can therefore be accepted as the basis for salvation.

Nor does any physical position of being poor, or afflicted, or persecuted hold any merit for salvation. Calvin asks: Does persecution and suffering provide for merit? No, he answers. Not even when the faithful are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.<sup>92</sup> In considering II Thessalonians i:5-7 and Hebrews vi:10 Calvin concludes: *Nullam illic meriti dignitatem significari: sed quia Deus pater vult nos, quos elegit filios, Christo primogenito conformari ...*<sup>93</sup> They suffer tribulationes ... *pro Christi nomine*<sup>94</sup> and bear in their body the marks of their Lord and Master.<sup>95</sup> Again he relates these matters to God's will, justice and judgement. In the chapter *De crucis tolerantia, quae pars est abnegationis*,<sup>96</sup> he writes that the faithful must undergo the offences and hatred of the world in labouring for the defence of the gospel, in maintaining the cause of righteousness, in declaring God's truths against Satan's falsehoods and in taking up the protection of the good and the innocent against the wrongs of the world.<sup>97</sup> These may imperil their lives, fortunes and honour, but should be borne for the sake of Christ. Suffering, whether justified or inequitable, cannot be harnessed to help manage man in gaining righteousness and salvation.

91 Cf. OS IV.263.8f. (*Inst.* 3.17.10).

92 OS IV.166.12 (*Inst.* 3.8.7): *Porro singularis illa est consolatio, ubi pro iustitia persecutionem patimur.* This was formulated for the 1539 edition.

93 OS IV.277.12f. (*Inst.* 3.18.7).

94 OS IV.277.17 (*Inst.* 3.18.7).

95 OS IV.277.20 (*Inst.* 3.18.7): ... *quia stigmata Domini nostri et magistri portamus in corpore.* These are the *signa* of the children of God. Calvin refers to Gal. 6:17. (Formulated in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*.)

96 OS IV.161.16 (*Inst.* 3.8).

97 OS IV.166.15f. (*Inst.* 3.8.7):

*Persecutionem pati pro iustitia dico, non tantum qui pro Evangelii defensione, sed qui pro quolibet iustitiae patrocinio laborant. Sive ergo in asserenda adversus Satanae mendacia Dei veritate, sive in suscipienda bonorum atque innocentium contra improborum iniurias tutela, necesse est incurrere in mundi offensiones et odia, unde aut vitae nostrae, aut fortunae, aut honori periculum immineat ...*

This was formulated in 1539.

Poverty considered in itself, Calvin asserts, is misery indeed; so is exile, contempt, imprisonment, ignominy. Ultimately, death itself is the last of all calamities. But when the favour of God breathes upon people, none of these aspects add to their happiness.<sup>98</sup> They must be contented with the testimony of Christ, that in these matters He has declared them blessed.<sup>99</sup> They are considered worthy to suffer shame for Christ's Name. If, being innocent and of good conscience, they are stripped of their possessions, they are reduced to poverty, their riches in heaven are increased; if driven from their homes, they have a more welcome reception into the family of God; if vexed and despised, they are more firmly rooted in Christ. It all is grace.<sup>100</sup> They know that riches and poverty, contempt and honour, are dispensed by God's will.<sup>101</sup> They must always look to the Lord so that by his guidance they may be led to whatever He has provided for them. If things do not go according to their wishes and hope, they will still be restrained from impatience and loathing of their condition, whatever it may be. Those who rest solely upon the blessing of God ... will neither strive with evil arts after those things which men customarily madly seek, which he realises will not profit him, nor will he, if things go well, give credit to himself or even his diligence, or industry, or fortune. Rather, he will give God the credit as its Author. ... Since this leads to their salvation, they consider that their affairs are ordained by the Lord.<sup>102</sup>

This issue becomes even more apparent from another angle. Christ undertook to bear the cross, Calvin remarks, to testify and prove his obedience to the Father. There are, on the contrary, many reasons for man to live constantly under the cross. People estimate their virtue above its proper worth. They indulge empty arrogant confidence in their flesh as if their faculties were sufficient without God's grace. Thus God visits them with disgrace, or poverty, or bereavement, or disease, or other inflictions. Hence they are brought to a more thorough knowledge of themselves by the trail of the cross.<sup>103</sup> Humbled, Calvin says, they learn to invoke God's strength. There is no security in own strength, own fortitude and own constancy. Bearing the cross, believers make

98 OS IV.166.24f. (*Inst.* 3.8.7).

99 OS IV.166.23 (*Inst.* 3.8.7): ... *in quibus ipse suo ore nos beatos pronuntiavit.* Calvin refers to Matt. 5:10.

100 OS IV.166.33, 167.1f. (*Inst.* 3.8.7).

101 OS IV.161.3, 161.13f. (*Inst.* 3.7.10): ... *ac eam quidem ipsam non ruere inconsiderato impetu, sed ordinatissima iustitia nobis bona simul ac mala dispensare.* The whole paragraph was included in the 1539 edition.

102 OS IV.169.17f. (*Inst.* 3.8.10). Formulated in 1539.

103 OS IV.162.28f. (*Inst.* 3.8.2): *Ergo vel ignominia, vel paupertate, vel orbitate, vel morbo, vel aliis calamitatibus nos affligit: quibus sustinendis longe impares, quantum ad nos attinet, mox succumbimus.*

progress on the path of humility and betake themselves to the grace of God.<sup>104</sup> Only the grace of God can be depended upon. Suffering and misery are therefore not only related to the reality of man's underserved acquittal, but also to Christ's continuous and salubrious salutary presence, provision and care. This again, Christ does of his own accord, by grace alone.

In terms of the consequences of his teaching on God's providence and of his rejection of all grounds that could be offered either as the foundation, or as co-operating or even in correlation with this foundation towards salvation, Calvin thus accords a constructive and encouraging significance to suffering (by poverty) and affliction (by poverty).<sup>105</sup> The chief reason for enduring the cross (poverty, exile, imprisonment, disease, bereavement, afflictions, *etc.*) derives from divine will and providence. The philosophers have committed a serious error. Scripture calls people to consider in the will of God his justice and equity and then his care for their own salvation, their spiritual poverty.<sup>106</sup> There is no true meaning in the frigid cant of the philosophers: Yield, because it is necessary. Instead, Scripture teaches a powerful song: Obey, because it is unlawful to resist; bear patiently, because it is rebellion against the justice of God. Tribulations are salutary. 'Our heavenly Father consoles us that in the very cross inflicted upon us, He provides for our salvation.'<sup>107</sup> Then their eyes open to see, to look to God. 'It is here that we receive eyes to see that riches and poverty, contempt and honors are dispensed by God. Everything depends entirely on the blessing of God.'<sup>108</sup> They know that their affairs are ordered by the Lord in the manner most conducive to their salvation. They are able to receive good and evil in their lives ... 'Indeed his blessing alone makes a way through all obstacles, and brings everything to a joyful and favorable issue.'<sup>109</sup> This is the knowledge of God. This is the knowledge of Christ. And, this is the knowledge of 'ourselves.'

104 OS IV.162.35 (*Inst.* 3.8.2): ... nisi eos crucis probatione in penitentiorem sui notitiam adducat.

105 Cf. OS IV.277.26 (*Inst.* 3.18.7): Quae subiicitur ratio, non ad probandam ullam dignitatem, sed spem regni Dei confirmandam pertinet. Persecution and tribulations, for example, rather strengthen hope in the Kingdom of God. The certainty of salvation depends on Christ's work, on the free covenant of his mercy.

106 OS IV.170.1f. (*Inst.* 3.8.11).

107 Translation by Beveridge, *Volume II*, 23. Cf. OS IV.170.20 (*Inst.* 3.8.11): ... hac etiam parte consolatur nos optimus Pater, dum asserit, se eo ipso quod nos cruce affligit, salutis nostrae consulere.

108 OS IV.160.8 (*Inst.* 3.7.9): ... ita res suas ordinari a Domino reputat.

109 OS IV.159.4f. (*Inst.* 3.7.8). Translation by Beveridge, *Volume II*, 13.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As indicated in the applicable footnotes, which record the text-historical development of the *Institutes*, it is evident that the substance of Calvin's thoughts and reflection on *paupertas*, as traced in this article, was included in the 1539 revised and elaborated Latin edition of the *Institutes*. At that early stage in his life of ministry his views (including — most importantly — the theological frame of reference in which the term *paupertas* emerges) had already matured.

Calvin refers in the *Institutes* to *paupertas* as reality and its devastating impact on those who fall victim to it. In this regard he raises existential situations from history, experiences, or events. The absence of any effort to relate or explain poverty in terms of causes is remarkable. *Paupertas* is embedded in the theological horizon of the teaching of Scripture on the *providentia Dei*. Consequently, the *providentia Dei*<sup>110</sup> is neither argued in categories of a passive perpetual divine determinism nor is it sacrificed to a temporary interim divine involvement.<sup>111</sup> Calvin cautiously upholds a reverent distance when it comes

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110 For a contemporary discussion of the teaching of Calvin on providence, see Helm, *op. cit.*, esp. 93f.; A. Baars, *Om Gods verhevenheid en Zijn nabijheid. De Drie-eenheid bij Calvin* (Kampen: Kok, 2004). Also see W-A Hauck, *Vorsehung und Freiheit nach Calvin* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1947); C.B. Partee, 'Calvin and Universal and Particular Providence', in: *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 69-88; P.C. Potgieter, 'Perspectives on the Doctrine of Providence in Some of Calvin's Sermons on Job', in: *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 54 (1&2) March & June 1998, 36-49. C.J. Kinlaw, *Trinitarian Theology and the Hidden God: Determinism and the Hiddenness of God in Calvin and Schleiermacher* (Ph.D. University of Virginia, 1998) is of opinion that Calvin's thoughts on providence (i.a.) presuppose a strong view of Divine determinism (cf. *ibid.*, 69). According to him, this results in the subordination of Christ and the Holy Spirit to God the Father, which ruins the Trinitarian structure of Calvin's theology (*ibid.*, 76f., 172, 250-251). Helm questions his interpretation of Calvin's teaching on Trinity: 'So Calvin's determinism, if that is what it is, is pluralistic rather than monistic and reductionistic' (*op. cit.*, 125).

111 Cf. the study of S.E. Schreiner, *The Theater of his Glory. Nature and Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001[2]), especially 16f. She calls to attention the (later post-1550) polemical context in which Calvin had to formulate his thoughts on providence, and concludes that he 'insisted on a doctrine of providence that both protected divine sovereignty and involved God directly in the sublunary realm of nature and history' (*ibid.*, 115). However, does she not underplay Calvin's expressive line of thinking before the 1550s in this regard? The tracing of the term *paupertas* in the *Institutes* indicated that Calvin's ideas on the providence of God were finalised early in his career. *Le Cathéchisme de l'Eglise de Genève* (1542) confirms this observation. For the text of this catechism, see W. Niesel, *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort*

to God's knowledge. However, when considering true and credible existential knowledge of God, the pastor withholds nothing from the splendour of the teaching of Scripture in this regard. Poverty and its effects *an sich* are not discussed. Rather, they are located in the scope of the presence of God, of being addressed by the Word of God and of the knowledge of God through faith.

In Calvin's line of argumentation it became apparent that *paupertas* (and its associated calamities and suffering) was linked to the constitutive (provided) true knowledge of God, of Christ and of 'ourselves' in terms of biblical revelation and qualification. In this way the use of physical poverty converges with that of spiritual poverty. Calvin reveals the landscape of reality in which the presuppositions of the popular philosophical concepts of fate, fortune and chance (as causes of poverty) are exposed as meaningless. A combination of theological and philosophical (meta-historical) concepts is not contemplated — Calvin directly involves Scripture as God's speaking Word. Poverty is therefore not a life-destructive fatality. It is anguish, misery, suffering. It does not threaten or obscure the presence of and relation with the living God in Christ.

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*reformierten Kirche* (Zürich: Theologische Buchhandlung, 1985), 3-41. (Henceforth *BSKORK* followed by the question, page no. and line no.) For a critical Latin text edition with modern German translation, see *Calvin-Studienausgabe Band 2 Gestalt und Ordnung der Kirche*, ed. E. Busch - A. Heron - C. Link - P. Opitz - E. Saxer - H. Scholl (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997), 1-135. For a bibliography of original editions of the catechism, cf. H. Jahr, *Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Confession de foi von 1559* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1964), 85-93. In the *Catechism* Calvin presents a synopsis of his view on the providence of God. The Almighty

a toutes creatures en sa main et subiection: qu'il dispose toutes choses par sa providence; gouverne le monde par sa volonté: et conduit tout ce qui se fait selon que bon luy semble (*BSKORK*, 23.5.24f.).

Because God is the Creator of heaven and earth, he

envoie la pluye et la secheresse: les gresles, les tempestes et le beau temps: fertilité et sterilité, santé et maladies. En somme, il a toutes choses à commandement, pour s'en servir selon qu'il luy semble bon (*BSKORK*, 27.6.5).

We may thus live unhurried, with still and peaceful minds, in all courage and security, knowing that God is our protector and defender (*BSKORK*, 29.6.21: '... veu que Dieu promet d'estre nostre protecteur, et de nous deffendre'. See also *COR* III,1.230.8: '... ut sedates tranquillisque animis in Deum recumbere et ... (to rest in God with quiet and tranquil minds)').

Calvin's subjacent lines of thinking behind the use of *paupertas* in the *Institutes* suggest that the relation between history as reality (including poverty or to fall victim to it) and the providence of God is to be apprehended in terms of the teaching of Scripture, and therefore as dynamic rather than static categories. Particular credible knowledge of God, of Christ, of 'ourselves' is created or received. This knowledge is not a mysterious Gnostic knowledge, but is constituted by the sense and meaning given to it by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. In this way God remains present, also in poverty. He is the burning lamp that guides us.

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*Institusie*

Armoede

Geestelike armoede

Lyding

Beproewing